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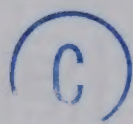




THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

JOHN WEBSTER'S THE WHITE DEVIL:  
A STUDY IN TRAGIC FORM

by



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A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
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ABSTRACT

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

This study of John Webster's "The White Devil" aims to show that the locus of Webster's tragedy is the series of minor dramatic conventions which are used in the play. In my introduction, I have given a brief resume of a major position in Webster criticism, showing that it has sought the locus of tragedy in a "hero" and suggesting that the conclusions of such a view are inevitably misleading. In my second chapter, I have analysed the dramatic conventions of the dream and the dumb show entitled John Webster's "The White Devil": A Study in Tragic Form, by concentrating on the response of the "audience" within the play submitted by Nathan L. Bernstein in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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## CHAPTER I

### WEBSTER CRITICISM

In his critical commentary on The White Devil, Gunnar Boklund concludes with the following remarks:

The persistence with which the theme of The White Devil was pursued brought with it another and more unusual consequence. The play depicts an existence disordered and without a core, and in order to do this convincingly the dramatist created a tragedy without a hero. No character is included who can faithfully reflect the moral argument implicit in the action; contrary to our original assumption, Flamineo's commentary throws no direct light on it. This lack of a protagonist to carry the theme from beginning to end is...an important device of the dramatist to bring the significance of The White Devil home to his audience. What is aimed at is distance from the picture of chaos that is being painted. By refusing to engage himself on the side of a principle of order, the author could achieve an impression of chaos irremediable and universal.

Unfortunately such aims and methods were likely to produce structural confusion of a subtler kind than has so far been discussed. The constant shifting of interest--from Brachiano to Vittoria, from Vittoria to Flamineo--the ambiguous attitude taken to these characters, and the largely irrelevant and never explicitly refuted arguments of Flamineo must produce uncertainty in the minds of the audience about the author's intentions that is detrimental to the effect of the drama. It is King Lear without both Lear and Edgar, the protagonist for good. Webster's apparent indifference to the moral quality of his characters carries a basically most challenging ambiguity too far. The irony which should cut both ways loses part of its power. In spite of its tragically relevant commentary on life, The White Devil represents a strangely imperfect realization of conspicuously ambitious aims. Webster's "failure" was largely due to his attempt to achieve the impossible. There are undoubtedly worse failures.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Boklund's conclusion rests on the assumption that there should be a hero to carry the theme [of an existence disordered and without a core] from beginning to end...." It is certainly true that Webster does not have a hero in The White Devil. But if Professor Boklund had pressed his point further, he may well have discovered that





Webster has a significantly creative alternative. Webster uses not the "old-fashioned"<sup>2</sup> convention of the tragic hero but a series of traditionally minor conventions which he transforms into the informing principle of the play. In place of the hero, Webster uses the conventions of the dream, the dumb show, the Papal Election, disguise, the trial, character-pictures, sententiae, and satire. It is in these individual conventions and in their apparently random disposition throughout the play that the theme, the moral argument, is carried from beginning to end.

What, in fact, we have in The White Devil is a shift in perspective and point of view from character to environment. That is, what is manifestly central in The White Devil is the environment of the characters and not the character as hero. This environment is crystallized in the individual conventions which, in turn, are disposed throughout the play in much the same way, for example, as the superimposed "images" on the chronological unfolding of an Ingmar Bergman film.

Moreover, to suggest as Professor Boklund does, that "Flammineo's commentary [which is largely satiric] throws no direct light on it [i.e. the moral argument implicit in the action]," is precisely the point, not the defect, of The White Devil. If, as I have suggested, the locus of tragedy is not the hero but the minor conventions which I have outlined above, then the locus of satire, similarly, may be these same dramatic conventions. Professor Boklund notes that Webster "refus[es] to engage himself on the side of a principle of order...."





I will alter that to read: Webster refuses to engage himself to the point of view of a single character. Flamineo points out to Camillo that "they that have the yellow Jaundeise, thinke all objects they looke on to bee yellow" (I.2.108).<sup>3</sup> If Flamineo's point of view is limited to his subjective responses, then his satire is similarly limited. And if Webster engages himself to Flamineo's point of view, then his own point of view as dramatist is similarly limited.

The point of view contained in each of the conventions, however, is not limited. It is objective and fundamentally complete where that of a "hero" is subjective and essentially incomplete. Moreover, if the loci of satire are the dramatic conventions which I have noted above, if these conventions are metaphors for the total environment in the world of The White Devil, if the dramatist "engages" himself to these conventions, not only does he broaden considerably his point of view, but he achieves a unique treatment of satire. Flamineo is the "satirist" of the play. But if Flamineo's satire is limited to a point of view narrower than that of the dramatist, this same satire, measured in the light of the dramatist's point of view, is ultimately self-defeating. To put it another way, Flamineo's satire exists in this play simply to show that in the world of The White Devil satire is impossible.

There is, moreover, a coherent moral or ethical rationale which underlies Webster's assumption of a point of view which is not limited to a single character. It is true, certainly, as Professor Boklund suggests, that the shifting of interest, of point of view, may produce





uncertainty in the minds of the audience detrimental to the effect of the drama. But such uncertainty, such detriment, will arise only if the "answer" is sought in the characters and not in the conventions. It is hardly that Webster is "indifferen[t] to the moral quality of his characters...." It is, rather, that in the world of The White Devil, the responsibility of the dramatist does not extend to pronouncing judgment on any of his characters. Indeed, in the world of this play, no judgment, least of all that of the dramatist, is possible. It is precisely this which informs the moral quality of the play. To adopt the point of view of a single character is implicitly to pass judgment from this limited perspective. That the moral quality of all the characters is singularly ambiguous suggests that the audience will not find an answer in them. On the other hand, the liberal disposition throughout the play of the minor conventions to which I pointed earlier, is a constant reminder to the theatre audience that in these conventions is contained the moral centre of the play. And any judgment which may be passed by the audience on any of the characters must necessarily address itself to the point of view adumbrated by the conventions. And if the audience does so judiciously, it will discover inevitably that in the world of The White Devil no such judgment is possible.

The inability or the refusal to see in the minor dramatic conventions of The White Devil an ethical rationale characterizes much of the commentary on the play. This critical oversight has not failed to produce severe and often misleading criticism of Webster. Madeline<sup>e</sup><sub>Λ</sub> Doran, for example, has accused Webster of an





inveterate habit of emphasis on good theatre at the expense of artistic consistency, or on vivid sympathetic insights at the expense of ethical coherence.<sup>4</sup>

Ian Jack, with somewhat less restraint, attacks Webster for what he calls his "peculiarly limited and deformed notion of ethics" which, he contends, is the product of an "imbalanced" mind and a moral bankruptcy. Webster, he concludes, has "no deeper purpose than to make our flesh creep...."<sup>5</sup> A similar inability or refusal to locate in these conventions the dynamic and dramatic centre of Webster's satire and tragedy has led to misleading criticism of Webster's structure.<sup>6</sup> And this, in turn, has provoked Webster critics to locate a rationale, a unity, variously in "atmosphere" (Brooke), "pity" (Eliot), "terror" (Swinburne) and in a moral vision of divine retribution which oversees the conflict of spiritual forces, the struggle between right and wrong (Cecil).<sup>7</sup>

It is the contention of this study, however, that the loci of the tragedy and satire of The White Devil are the dramatic conventions which I have noted above. I will try to show that these conventions constitute the point of view of the play and that the utterances and behaviour of the characters in the play can be measured only against this point of view. Beginning with an analysis of the dream, I will try to show that these conventions exist to render satire impossible in the world of The White Devil and to guide and inform the responses and the judgments of the theatre audience to the play.





## CHAPTER II

### THE DREAM AND THE DUMB SHOWS

My first consideration in this study is the dream which Vittoria relates to Brachiano in II, 2.<sup>1</sup> I begin with the dream convention because it is a minor climax of their first meeting--an assignation which had been "arranged" by Vittoria's brother, Flamineo, who is pandering his sister for political favor.

VIT. To passe away the time I'le tell your  
    grace,

A dreame I had last night. BRAC. Most  
    wishedly.

VIT. A foolish idle dreame,  
Methought I walkt about the mid of night,  
Into a Church-yard, where a goodly Eu Tree  
Sprede her large roote in ground--under that  
    Eu,

As I sat sadly leaning on a grave,  
Checkered with crosse-sticks, their came  
    stealing in

Your Dutchesse and my husband--one of them  
A picaxe bore, th'other a Rusty spade,  
And in rough termes they gan to challenge  
    me,

About this Eu. BRAC. That tree?

VIT. This harmless Eu.  
They told me my entent was to root up  
That well-growne Eu, and plant i'th steed of  
    it

A withered black-thorne, and for that they  
    vow'd

To bury me alive: my husband straight  
With picaxe gan to dig, and your fell  
    Dutchesse

With shovell, like a fury, voyded out  
The earth & scattered bones--Lord how me  
    thought

I trembled, and yet for all this terror  
I could not pray. FLAM. No the divell was in  
    your dreame.





VIT. When to my rescue there arose me thought  
 A whirlwind, which let fall a massy arme  
 From that strong plant,  
 And both were struck dead by that sacred Eu  
 In that base shallow grave that was their  
 due.

(I.2.219)

The dramatic convention of the dream has many of the elements of a self-contained play. It is figuratively visible to the eye. It has its own setting and stage props: midnight; a graveyard, tombstones, a yew tree. It contains implicit stage directions. It has its own cast of characters: Vittoria, Camillo, Isabella, and Brachiano. It has, also, its own themes and dramatic conflicts. Finally, it has its own immediate audience of Cornelia, Flamineo, and Brachiano. Since the "audience" point of view is strikingly manifest, it is appropriate, perhaps, to begin by examining the interplay between the dream situation and the audience response to this situation.

Brachiano's response to the dream is singularly romantic. He envisions himself as the chivalric-protective knight who will save his beleaguered lady-love from sinister villains:

BRAC. Sweetly shall I enterpret this your  
 dream,  
 You are lodged within his armes who shall  
 protect you  
 From all the feavers of a jealous hus-  
 band,  
 From the poore envy of our flegmaticke  
 Dutchesse--...

(I.2.249)

Brachiano's response presupposes Vittoria as the innocent victim of Isabella and Camillo, whose sole impulse is to bury her alive. The central image in Vittoria's dream, and the one to which Vittoria is related positively, is the natural one of the yew tree (Brachiano). Looked at





side by side, the two pictures of Vittoria as victim seeking aid from the yew tree may suggest to Brachiano that Vittoria is unhappy, that her unhappiness stems from a natural desire which is frustrated by or cannot find a place in the social environment of marriage. The dream, however, ends happily for Brachiano (and Vittoria). Vittoria is saved by the yew tree from Isabella and Camillo, both of whom are killed. From Brachiano's point of view, their deaths are incidental to the fact that Vittoria has been saved and that he has saved her. For Brachiano, then, the dream is a visual proof of the triumph of a nature which is just and protective over a social environment which is unjust and oppressive. The dream, also, is a visual proof not only of the heroic possibilities dormant in his own nature, but of his ability to be the heroic, chivalric, dragon-killer. Has not Vittoria's dream recognized this quality in him?

Moreover, Brachiano sees in the apparent frustration of Vittoria a kinship with his own sense of disappointment. He believes that he is unable to fulfill the romantic role which he projects because of his responsibilities as a governor of the body politic, as a husband, and as a father:

I'll seat you above law and above scandal,  
 Give to your thoughts the invention of  
     delight  
 And the fruition; nor shall government  
 Divide me from you longer than a care  
 To keepe you great: you shall to me at  
     once,  
 Be dukedome, health, wife, children,  
     friends and all.

(I.2.253)





For Brachiano, consequences are incidental to the realization of his desires. What is "real" and meaningful resides in the idealized pictures of himself and of Vittoria in the dream. Vittoria, the beautiful princess, imprisoned in the forbidding castle of social convention, is rescued by her dashing, fearless hero, the knight of Nature, Brachiano.

But into this dreaming world there obtrudes the choric voice of Cornelia, Vittoria's mother. Cornelia responds not only to the dream but also to the scene of the first meeting between Vittoria and Brachiano (I.2.191), which immediately precedes the dream and which was "arranged" by Cornelia's son, Flamineo, who is desperate for political favor. Cornelia's response proceeds from a traditional ethical point of view. She regards the behaviour of Vittoria, Brachiano, and Flamineo as rooted in "violent lust" (I.2.210), and summarizes their action in images of ruin and desolation (I.2.206;261) and in the universal plaint of all parents throughout all of human history:

COR. O thou dost make my brow bend to the  
earth  
Sooner then nature--see the curse of children!  
In life they keepe us fre[qu]ently in teares,  
And in the cold grave [leave] us in pale  
feares.

(I.2.269)

In Cornelia's scheme of things, the consequences of human behaviour constitute the scale of judgment. She regards the dream as the crystallization of those potential consequences which arise naturally from the preceding love scene. Her basis of judgment is simple: if the consequences are bad for other people, any action which may produce such consequences is therefore bad:





COR. The lives of Princes should like dyals  
move,

Whose regular example is so strong,  
They make the times by them go right or  
wrong.

FLA. So, have you done? COR. Unfortunate  
Camillo!

VIT. I do protest if any chaste deniall,  
If anything but bloud could have alayed  
His long suite to me...

COR. I will joyne with thee,  
To the most wofull end [e'er] mother  
kneel'd

If thou dishonour thus thy husband's bed,  
Bee thy life short as are the funerall teares  
In great mens...BRAC. Fye, fye, the woman's  
mad.

COR. Be thy act Judas-like, betray in kissing--  
Maiest thou be envied during his short breath,  
And pitied like a wretch after [his] death.

(I.2.279)

Flamineo is castigated not simply because he is a pimp. The pandering of his own sister for political favor is a cynical repudiation of the traditional family bond, the basis of human society. The same frame of reference applies to Vittoria, a whore, an adultress and, in the dream vision, a potential murderess. And the Duke Brachiano is a potential murderer not only of his wife and of Camillo, but of a social order which governs the lives of many human beings.

Cornelia regards as real and meaningful those ideals which from her perspective should govern human action: order, harmony, love, honor. A prince should behave ethically, a wife should honor and love her husband and a child his parents. In Cornelia's view, the ideal is the normative and, measured against this norm, the behaviour of Brachiano and Vittoria (and Flamineo) is terrifyingly perverse.

Cornelia's response is choric because it suggests an ethical alternative to the response of Brachiano. The view of Flamineo, on the other hand, has not this same choric quality. Flamineo sees the





dream as an instigation to murder:

FLAM. Excellent Divell,  
 She hath taught him in a dreame  
 To make away his Dutchesse and her husband.  
 (I.2.246)

His remarks, however, suggest not a simple condemnation, but an approbation. There are in this world degrees of devils and Vittoria is an "Excellent Divell." Where Cornelia sees the dream as an augury of potential consequences, Flamineo regards it as a deliberate invention on Vittoria's part: "She hath taught him in a dreame...." To regard the dream as deliberate, to call Vittoria twice (Cf. also I.2.240) a devil, is to put her in the camp of that archetypal temptress, Eve, for whose indiscretions man ostensibly lost both his innocence and his paradise. Flamineo's point of view suggests that all women are whores, the source of man's undoing. But some whores are better than others.

There is justification for Flamineo's view. The dream contains the essential characters and stage props of the original Garden of Eden: Man, Woman, a tree. But the Garden of Love has become Blake's graveyard, with "tombstones where flowers should be." For Flamineo, woman is not only responsible for man's loss of innocence, but for his mortality as well. Flamineo's frame of reference then is mythic. He sees in the dream the visual proof that woman is the cause of sexual deception and death. And, while he implicitly condemns Vittoria for her womanhood, he cannot but marvel at her style.

Three views of Vittoria, then, emerge from the dramatic interplay of the dream situation and the audience response to this situation.





The first is the traditional romance view, in which Vittoria is the innocent and fragile Lady who must be protected from wrong by her Sir Launcelot. The second is the traditional choric or ethical viewpoint in which Vittoria is the unfaithful wife and ungrateful daughter, the potential source of social disorder. The last is the traditional mythic viewpoint: Vittoria is the incarnation of sexual deception and the cause of man's mortality and his loss of innocence. But if all three responses are traditionally applied to women and if these three different responses arise from a single convention, what is suggested about the nature and the function of the convention itself?

First, the dream unites in itself three different points of view not to show that one is more "right" than another, but to show the essential inseparability of the three. The dream, in other words, is a "complete" point of view, and the content of the dream bears this out. The central image of the dream is the yew tree. To Brachiano it is the symbol of nature and a natural freedom. But he disregards in his response the fact that the tree is rooted in the ground of a cemetery. To Flamineo, on the other hand, the tree reflects sexual deception, loss of innocence, and death. Flamineo, however, disregards the possibility of sexual freedom which the tree adumbrates. Cornelia sees in the tree a sort of selfish individualism which, from her point of view, can only be destructive. She does not acknowledge any value in that individualism, nor does she acknowledge any limitation in her point of view. But the yew tree brings together in a single image these diverse viewpoints. Just as, in the Old Testament metaphor, good and evil are part of the same fruit of the same tree, so in the dream they





are inseparable. The viewpoints of Cornelia, Flamineo, and Brachiano are consequently limited and exclusive. Each of these three characters sees in the dream the visible proof of his own viewpoint. As Flamineo points out to Camillo, however, "they that have the yellow Jaundeise, thinke all objects they looke on to bee yellow" (I.2.108).

Webster dramatizes judiciously the factors which inform the perceiving eye, the perceivers' points of view. Let us take Brachiano as an example. I have suggested that Vittoria's dream is the formalization of the source and nature of Brachiano's frustration. Brachiano would like to "live out" the heroic potentialities of himself which he sees in the dream. He believes he cannot because of his ethical responsibility as governor of the body politic, as a husband, and as a father. Let us now test these statements in the larger context of The White Devil.

Despite the presence of a child, regarded usually as the ocular proof of health and goodness in a marriage, Brachiano is driven from his wife to the adulterous suit of a married Vittoria. And Isabella's vow to get him back is expressed in shocking terms: "these armes," she tells her brother Francisco,

Shall charme his poyson, force it to obeying  
And keep him chast from an infected straying.  
(II.1.17)

But the tone of Isabella's sentiments is merely a reflection of Brachiano's revulsion from her. When Isabella kisses him, Brachiano reacts violently:

BRAC. O your breath!  
Out upon sweete meates, and continued  
Physicke!  
The plague is in them. ISA. You have oft for  
these two lippes





Neglected Cassia or the naturall sweetes  
 Of the Spring-violet--they are not yet much  
 [with]ered--...

(II.1.166)

Isabella is growing old, and Brachiano's revulsion is not so much from her as from the mortality, the physical corruption, of human life which she represents to him. Brachiano is Donne's "sublunary lover," Shakespeare's devotee of "rosy lips and cheeks." At his first meeting with Vittoria, Brachiano remarks that "all delight doth itselife soon'st devour" (I.2.194). But to remark is not necessarily to like or to accept. Indeed, for Brachiano, there is the profound conviction that life should not be so. Neither man, nor man's love, nor man's dreams should be servant to time. And there is, indeed, a timeless, dreaming quality in his response to Vittoria's dream. Brachiano, in the dream, is the romantic-chivalric hero; always "that strong plant" which wields "a massy arme", subject to no law of time. It is much like the quality with which Spenser invests the chivalric world in "Prothalamion." To love Isabella then, is to love, not only the "nice" in human life, but the unpleasant as well. And to accept the unpleasant, the revolting, is to accept one's own physical limitations, one's own mortality, one's own corruptibility, one's own guilts. But Brachiano cannot. He transforms his own weakness (and Isabella's religious piety) into a metaphor of sexual deception with which he accuses his wife:

BRAC. So!--I wonder much  
 What amorous whirlwind hurried you to  
Rome.  
 ISA. Devotion, my Lord. BRAC. Devotion?

Register of the Society of the Friends of the  
of the Society of the Friends of the  
[illegible]

(1844)

Isabelle is growing old, and Frederick's condition is not so  
much improved as from the necessity, the physical condition of  
human life which she represents to him. Frederick is now  
"entirely alone," Shakespeare's "lover of the life and death."  
At his first meeting with Victoria, Frederick remarks that "the  
both Isabelle seem to be" (I. 3, 144). But in truth it was  
is so like or so much, indeed, the difference, there is the  
conviction that life should not be as it is now, and that  
not man's dream should be common to them. And this is, indeed,  
a timeless, dreaming quality in his response to Victoria's dream  
Frederick, in the dream, is the woman's ideal, and "the  
second place" which is "a new world," subject to the law of  
it is much like the quality with which she sees the world.  
said in "Frederick's" "To love is to be loved, and to  
the "time" is human life, but the response is not, and it is  
the response, the response, the response, the response, the  
response, one's own reality, one's own responsibility, and the  
response, the response, the response, the response, the  
Isabelle's religious (and a response to the response) and the

When we are thinking of the world, we are  
[illegible]  
[illegible]



Is your soule charg'd with any grievous  
sinne?  
ISA. 'tis burdened with too many; and I  
thinke  
The oftener that we cast our reckonings up  
Our sleepes will be the sounder.  
(II.1.152)

Brachiano compounds the problem by associating his feelings for Isabella with her brother, Francisco, who made the wedding match, and with another brother, the Cardinal Monticelso who, as a churchman, is indirectly responsible for the sanctification of the marriage:

Your brother the great Duke, because h'as  
gallies,  
And now and then ransackes a Turkish flye-  
boate,  
(Now all the hellish furies take his soule,)  
First made this match--accursed be the Priest  
That sang the wedding Masse, and even my  
Issue.  
(II.1.190)

Since Francisco is a leader of the body politic and Monticelso a high church official, it is a short step in Brachiano's mind from the symbols of social and religious polity to society itself. He had indicated as much in his response to Vittoria's dream (Cf.I.2.253). Brachiano's feelings, finally, manifest themselves in acts of murder which he does not himself commit but which he engineers. The murders are dramatized in the convention of the dumb-show.

The dumb-show,<sup>2</sup> like the dream, is a self-contained play. Like the dream, it has its own audience. And like the dream, it is again a model of the ethical centre against which all action in the play will be measured. As in the dream-situation, the relation between the audience response and the total dumb show situation is ironic.





[CON.]. Put on this night-cap sir, 'tis  
 charm'd, and now  
 I'll shew you by my strong-commanding Art  
 The circumstance that breakes your Dutch[e]sse  
 heart.

A DUMBE SHEW.

Enter suspiciously Julio and Christophero, they draw a curtaine wher Brachiano's picture is, they put on spectacles of glass, which cover their eyes and noses, and then burne perfumnes afore the picture, and wash the lips of the picture, that done, quenching the fire and putting off their spectacles they depart laughing.

Enter Isabella in her night-gowne as to bed-ward, with lights after her, Count Lodovico, Giovanni, Guidantonio and others waighting on her, shee kneeles downe as to prayers, then drawes the curtaine of the picture, doe's three reverences to it, and kisses it thrice, shee faints and will not suffer them to come nere it, dies, sorrow exprest in Giovanni and in Count Lodovico, shees conveid out solemnly.

BRAC. Excellent, then shee's dead--CON. She's  
 Poysoned,  
 By the fum'd picture--  
     ...now turne another way,  
 And view Camillo's farre more polliticke fate--  
 Strike louder musicke from this charmed ground,  
 To yeeld, as fits the act, a Tragicke sound.

THE SECOND DUMB SHEW.

Enter Flamineo, Marcello, Camillo, with foure more as Captaines, they drinke healths and dance, a vaulting horse is brought out into the roome; Marcello and two more whispered out of the roome, while Flamineo and Camillo strip themselves into their shirts, as to vault; complement who shall beginne; as Camillo is about to vault, Flamineo pitcheth him upon his necke, and with the help of the rest, wriths his neck about, seemes to see if it be broke, and layes him foulded double as 'twere under the horse, makes [shewe] to call for helpe, Marcello comes in, laments, sends for the Cardinall and Duke, who comes forth with armed men, wonders at the act, commands the bodie to be carried home, apprehends Flamineo, Marcello, and the rest, and go[es] as 'twere to apprehend Vittoria.

BRAC. 'Twas quaintly, done,...  
 (II.2.21)





Brachiano's response is one of approbation. He approves, not only the actual murders, but the ways in which they have been carried out. In Vittoria's dream, Brachiano had seen Vittoria as figuratively asphyxiated alive by Camillo and Isabella. Poisoning and strangulation, then, are appropriate. Brachiano approves, also, because the dumb shows have fulfilled his expectations. That is, he sees in the dumb shows the ocular verification of his freedom from Isabella and all that he associates with her, from Camillo, and from the responsibilities which he has to the greater society around him. But Brachiano's expectations are ironically undercut by the dumb shows, just as they are by the dream. The convention of the dumb show, like the convention of the dream, adumbrates for the theatre audience a complete point of view.

In the first dumb show, Isabella is poisoned while she is expressing, in terms which are analogous to religious devotion, her love for Brachiano. Camillo is killed immediately after taking part in a toast and a dance, and while participating in a game. All these details--the religious devotion, the toast, the dance, the game--represent for the larger theatre audience visible or pictorial proof of a world of belief and harmony and love and peace. To kill Isabella and Camillo, as Cornelia had predicted, is to kill, also, a way of life and of belief.

The dumb shows, like the dream, then, unite in themselves elements of good and evil, harmony and disharmony, love and death. And like the dream, the dumb shows disclose these contrary elements to be inseparable. Brachiano, by virtue of a passion for Vittoria which strongly colors his point of view, cannot see that his will-to-freedom is inseparable from





death, that his will-to-love, to be the heroic protector, is inseparable from evasion of responsibility and from chaos. Brachiano's point of view cannot comprehend in itself the essential paradox of human life which is implied both by the dream and the dumb shows. The paradox, that is, that the human being is both good and bad, strong and weak, infinite in his desire and finite in his ability to achieve this desire. That, indeed, to love at all is to comprehend in one's love, as perhaps Isabella does, all this. By implication, Brachiano has a view of his own and of human perfectibility and innocence which human nature simply cannot bear. And insofar as Brachiano causes another person to "live out" this view, then it is tyrannical. Insofar as this view presumes itself to be a "true" and absolute measuring stick, exclusive unto itself, it is tyrannical. By tyrannical, I mean a point of view which is limited in its perception, yet which considers itself as an absolute frame of reference from which to judge the behaviour of others. To say, for example, that there are two orders of women, good and bad, is tyrannical in the effects which such a view has on women. Leslie Fiedler explains tyranny this way:

There are not, in fact, two orders of women, good and bad, nor is there even one which seems for a little while bad, only to prove in the end utterly unravished and pure. There are only two sets of expectations and a single imperfect kind of woman caught between them: only actual incomplete females, looking in vain for a satisfactory definition of their role in a land of artists who insist on treating them as goddesses or bitches. The dream role and the nightmare role alike deny the humanity of women, who, baffled, switch from playing out one to acting out the other.<sup>3</sup>



The pathos of Brachiano lies in his illusion that the human being is either one or the other. Brachiano's viewpoint is obscene because he polarises human nature, forces it to adjust to something which, by its very nature, it cannot be. Brachiano cannot accept anything which presumes to diminish him or his dream of what man should be. He sees in himself heroi-romantic qualities, hungers after the aspirations evoked by the human mind and heart. But he cannot, at the same time, see in himself the irascible adolescent, who in his spite provokes suffering and despair and death. Brachiano has yet to learn that he has created man in his own image. He has yet to learn forgiveness: to forgive man his inescapable humanity.

To summarize, several points may be said to arise from this discussion of the conventions of the dream and dumb shows. Both conventions crystallize in themselves what has gone before and establish the dramatic matrix for what will come. The interplay of "audience" response and "situation" suggests that there will be a conflict not only between three distinct and limited points of view, or "ways to live one's life," but also between these individual viewpoints and the persons to whom they are applied. In this sense, both conventions are part of the temporal "action" of the play. But the conventions are also plays in themselves, existing also outside the mainstream of time in the play. Like a painting, for example, the conventions are simply "there." But they are there to serve as a reminder to the theatre audience. They reflect a "total" point of





view to which the theatre audience must address itself before it can "interpret" or judge events and characters in the play. The theatre audience is thus learning how to look at the pictures which make up the play. It is learning, also, the incompleteness of its own point of view and the relative nature of its own traditional frameworks from which judgment and satire may proceed.

When two essentially opposite points of view are set against each other, these points of view may be considered as complementary. But they may be regarded, also, as implicitly satiric of each other. By satire, I mean the ridiculing or attacking of one thing by another presumably ideal. For example, Brachiano has an ideal in which he sees himself as the heroic, chivalric lover. Cornelia, on the other hand, has an ideal in which she sees human beings living and behaving ethically and responsibly in a social context. Brachiano sets his view against Cornelia's, in which he sees frustration, physical decrepitude, and death. Conversely, Cornelia sees in Brachiano's view lust, chaos, and death. Insofar as Brachiano presumes his view to be the true and the ideal, it is for him implicitly satiric of Cornelia's. Conversely, insofar as Cornelia presumes her view to be the true and the ideal, it is satiric of Brachiano's. Both views, however, are deflated when measured against the "total" point of view which the conventions of the dream and the dumb shows figure forth. The complete point of view shows the others to be fragmentary and relative. If there is no absolute referential point, satire, as it is traditionally understood, cannot exist for it has nothing from which to proceed. The conventions of the dream and the dumb shows, then, render satire obsolete.





To suggest that satire is obsolete augments my earlier remarks on tyranny. Insofar as the ideal is adhered to, insofar as it constitutes the basis of our "traditional" expectations of other human beings regardless of the effect produced on these human beings, then the ideal itself is tyrannical and evil. Taken to its logical extreme, it is, in modern terms, the horror of the crematoria out of whose smoke and ashes there will ostensibly emerge an Aryan perfection. These points are given a fuller consideration in the next chapter on the Papal Election.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE PAPAL ELECTION AND THE CONVENTION OF DISGUISE

The idea of tyranny in point of view and audience expectation is developed further in the convention of the Papal Election. For the theatre audience, the first question may very well be, what is the function of this convention? Why is it in the play? Looking casually at the Election scene, the audience may decide that it is the delineation of an ideal whose purpose it is to satirize silently the figure of Cardinal Monticelso.<sup>1</sup> Monticelso: the usurer (III.2.160), the blackmailer (IV.1.30) and the accomplice to murder, who, in the dress of a prince of the Church, professes the role of the pious Christian. Looked at in these terms, Monticelso is unequivocally evil. But, as in the dream and in the dumb shows, Webster does not permit his audience the luxury of such simplification. Again, the theatre audience must consider the "total" point of view which is contained within the framework of the election.

What is this total point of view? First, the Papal Election is a ritual reenactment of the continuance of God's word on earth. That is, it is the translation from divine into human terms of God's eternal nature. But this ritual, which ensures the Apostolic Succession, shows what the morality play, Everyman, states explicitly: even the Pope is subject to death. Man is neither perfect nor eternal, and Monticelso is a man. Moreover, if the Election presents the view that God's agent must be perfect, why does it, at the same time, make in itself allowances for human imperfection?





Enter servants with severall  
dishes covered.

[LOD.] Stand, let me search your dish, who's  
this for?

SER. For my Lord Cardinall Monticelso.

LOD. Who's this...?

SER. For my Lord Cardinall of Burbon.

FRE. EMB. Why doth he search the dishes--to  
observe

What meat is drest? ENG. EMB. No Sir, but to  
prevent,

Least any letters should be convei'd in  
To bribe or to sollicite the advancement  
Of any Cardinall--when first they enter  
'Tis lawfull for the Embassadors of  
Princes

To enter with them, and to make their suit  
For any man their Prince affecteth best;  
But after, till a general election,  
No man may speak with them.

(IV:3.21)

In fact, the ritual reflects not simply man's psychic necessity for heaven, but also his physical necessity to live on earth. God and Caesar are not mutually exclusive; they exist together in the same seed. Human strength is inseparable from human weakness, perfection from imperfection, good from evil. In Aeropagitica, Milton wrote:

Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned, that those confused seeds which were imposed upon Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixed. It was from out the rind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil.... Assuredly, we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness....<sup>2</sup>





If the audience sees the function of the election as satiric of Monticelso, then it refuses to acknowledge its own kinship with the Cardinal. On the other hand, if it does acknowledge this kinship, then satire is not possible. Let us consider the analogy of Chaucer's Pardoner.

In "The Pardoner's Tale," Chaucer deals with the problem of a corrupt vessel seeking to prove its efficacy to other imperfect vessels, the Canterbury Pilgrims. Chaucer confronts the fact of a Christian Orthodoxy--the ultimate referential frame for medieval man--with the fact of human frailty as exemplified by the Pardoner. In terms of Christian orthodoxy, the Pardoner is satirized for his behaviour. In the eyes of the Canterbury Pilgrims, he is also satirized. The Pardoner, however, insists that he is no Prince, no leader of men, no Abraham. He insists that he is a weak and corrupt creature ministering to other weak and corrupt creatures. But the Pardoner is condemned to be the sacrificial figure of the group of Pilgrims. The host and the other Pilgrims do not acknowledge their kinship with him. He is expected to be excellent and inevitably fails, and so he is sacrificed by the others, equally imperfect, who cannot or will not acknowledge their own imperfections. His sacrifice, also, is a visible proof of the validity and existence of the ideal to which he is sacrificed. From the Pardoner's point of view, the demands which are made of him are extreme and tyrannical. But the Pardoner's behaviour and ministrations are obscene because from the Pilgrims' point of view, they deny implicitly a just and loving God.



Like the Pardoner, Monticelso is measured by the expectations which people have of him. Like the Pardoner, Monticelso is sacrificed to the projections of his peers. Webster uses a brilliant illustration to make this point. Monticelso in IV.3 berates Lodovico for the latter's avowed intent to revenge himself upon Brachiano. Francisco, who seeks the murder of Brachiano but who does not wish to appear involved in it, sends a messenger with a thousand ducats to Lodovico. The messenger tells Lodovico that the money came from Cardinal Monticelso (IV.3.134). Lodovico's response is no surprise:

Why now 'tis come about. He rail'd upon me;  
 And yet these Crownes were told out and laid  
     ready,  
 Before he knew my voiage. O the Art,  
 The modest forme of greatnesse! that do sit  
 Like Brides at wedding dinners, with their  
     looks turn'd  
 From the least wanton jests, their puling  
     stomacke  
 Sicke of the modesty, when their thoughts  
     are loose...  
 Even acting of those hot and lustfull sports  
 Are to ensue about midnight: such is his  
     cunning!  
 He sounds my depth thus with a golden  
     plummet,...

(IV.3.143ff.)

The fact of Monticelso's evil does not justify the willingness of others to damn him for what he is not. Monticelso is sufficiently damned already. In spite of his evil, Monticelso wants to be listened to. He preaches ethical behaviour to Brachiano (II.1.27) and again to Lodovico (IV.3.119). But neither listens. For Brachiano and for Lodovico, Monticelso is nothing more than a sly politician disguised as a priest. Everything he says is but a political manoeuvre and, as such, will be greeted with the contempt and scathing sarcasm of a Lodovico:





Holie father,  
 I come not to you as an Intelligencer,  
 But as a penitent sinner. What I utter  
 Is in confession merely; which you know  
 Must never bee reveal'd.

(IV.3.109ff.)

But Monticelso is both his disguise and the evil which he disguises. He unites in himself both the priest and evil politician. Like Chaucer's Pardoner, he is corrupt, and like the Pardoner he wants to be listened to, as is suggested by how often he preaches. But no one ever listens. For the audience, for the characters in the play, Monticelso is and always will be a wolf disguised as a lamb. To understand this is to understand the pathos which is implicit in his character.

The convention of disguise which arises from the medium of the Papal Election is developed more fully in the character of Francisco. Disguise is Francisco's forte. Intent on carrying out Brachiano's murder, Francisco has come to the court of Brachiano disguised as the Moor, Mulinassar. So successful is his mask, that Flamineo says of him:

I have not seene a goodlier personage,  
 Nor ever talkt with man better  
     experienc't  
 In State-affaires or rudiments of warre.  
 He hath by report, serv'd the Venetian  
 In Candy these twice seven yeares, and bene  
     chiefe  
 In many a bold designe.

(V.1.6)

For the audience, the disguise may appear only to emphasize Francisco's evil. It may be regarded, then, as a silent satiric comment. But the medium of disguise, like the conventions of the dream, the dumb show, the Papal Election, works against such a view.





The convention of disguise unites in itself both good and evil. It suggests that the character which is assumed in the disguise is a psychological possibility of the disguised character. Men, that is, put on masks of that which they would like to be but which, for various reasons, they cannot be. The convention of disguise, like the dream, the dumb shows, and the Papal Election, undercuts the satiric impulse. By showing that good and evil exist together, by showing good in evil and evil in good, it deflates the possibility of an ideal referential frame from which satire may proceed. What remains is a terrifying and pathetic revelation. Francisco cannot be the good Mulinassar, except in disguise. Moreover, he can be the Moor only to commit murder, to revenge himself on Brachiano. Francisco is profoundly conscious of this split in his psyche, and this consciousness is touched with a profound regret:

And yet mee thinkes that this revenge is  
     poore,  
 Because it steales upon him like a theif--  
 To have tane him by the Caske in a pitcht  
     feild,  
 Led him to Florence!

(IV.1.77)

Several points may be said to arise from the discussion of the Papal Election and the convention of disguise. Like the dream and the dumb shows, these two conventions present to the theatre audience a total point of view. This total point of view, again, undercuts the satiric impulse by deflating the fixed frame of reference from which satire may proceed. There is, however, another consideration which the Papal Election makes almost explicit. I have suggested that the



total point of view of the Papal Election consists in acknowledging the following paradox: that man must render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is His. In the dumb shows, Isabella does both. She tenders her love to the Duke Brachiano in terms which strongly suggest religious ritual. But having done so, she dies. In her response to the dream, Cornelia asserts that man, the social creature, must behave ethically and responsibly. Flamineo's reading of the dream, on the other hand, is suggestively theocentric. But common to both points of view is the central image of the dream, an image of death: a yew tree which is rooted firmly in a graveyard. The Papal Election, similarly, makes allowance in itself for Caesar as well as for God. But this does not prevent the death of even the Pope.

In his disguise as the good Moor, Mulinassar, Francisco, too, obeys the injunctions of two worlds. The biblical edict asks an eye for an eye, and so Francisco must avenge the deaths of Isabella and Cornelia. But as leader of the body politic, he is responsible, also, for the preservation of order and for the welfare and safety of his subjects:

FRA. Shall I defye him [Brachiano], and impose  
a warre  
Most burthensome on my poore subjects neckes;  
Which at my will I have not power to end?  
You know; for all the murders, rapes, and  
thefts,  
Committed in the horred lust of warre,  
He that unjustly caus'd it first proceed,  
Shall find it in his grave and in his seed.  
(IV.1.7)





In order, however, to avoid war, Francisco must pervert his potentialities for goodness, as he does in the guise of Mulinassar, and for love, as he does in his fraudulent "love-letter" to Vittoria. And when, finally, he does succeed in avenging Isabella's death, he has caused only more death. He has not brought back either Isabella or Camillo, nor will he, as a man, be spared death. Death, in fact, is intimately associated with each of the conventions. It is the ultimate referential point of each of them.

The point I wish to make is this. Each convention presents for the theatre audience a total point of view, a form of complete understanding. In the world of the play, this understanding is rendered null and void by the fact of death. On the other hand, the "death" of the character in the play does not nullify for the theatre audience the "how" of that character's life. For example, Isabella's love for Brachiano, while erased by her death in the play, is not erased from the memory of the theatre audience. Let us take it a step further. The complete point of view may be said to exist for a fleeting moment, and then, only to satirize itself, cancel itself out, by virtue of the fact of death. But the "death" of the character is necessary to the theatre audience as a reminder that how one lives one's life is important, even in the face of death. I will now test these and other considerations against the "action" of the play.





## CHAPTER IV

### THE TRIAL<sup>1</sup>

The "audience" response to Vittoria's trial is singularly equivocal. There are, first, the point-counterpoint responses of the French and English ambassadors:

FR. EMB. Shee hath lived ill.  
ENG. EMB. Trew, but the Cardinals too bitter.  
(III.2.110)

There is the impassioned outburst of Vittoria herself at the end of the trial:

VIT. A rape, a rape! MON. How? VIT. Yes, you  
have ravisht justice,  
Forced her to do your pleasure.  
(III.2.285)

And there is, finally, the ambiguous response of Flamineo. Convinced, apparently, that he will have no reward for his services to Brachiano, Flamineo "faine[s] a madde humor for the disgrace of [his] sister" (III.2.316) and responds violently to the remarks of the French ambassador, (III.3.18). Monticelso has declared Vittoria guilty. But the uncertainty of the audience response warrants a reexamination both of the trial scene and of Monticelso's judgment.

In spite of Francisco's admission that they "have nought but circumstances / To charge her with, about her husband's death" (III.1.4), Monticelso proceeds to try Vittoria. Monticelso, however, is faced with a delicate problem. The convention of the trial rests on the expectation that there will be proved an unequivocal parallel between what the ear hears and what the eye sees. That is, there will be visual proofs to



support the accusation. But if Monticelso's evidence is circumstantial, how can he manufacture visual proof? Monticelso settles on the medium of verbal pictures, that is, the genre of "character" in the Overburian and Websterian tradition.

Character is a generalized rather than a particularized view of the human being.<sup>2</sup> It is a convention which treats the human being as a type in much the same way, for example, that the morality play treats Noah's wife as a type of the nagging wife. Let me extend the example. A Good Woman, according to one of Overbury's characters, is comforting to a man, sweet, virtuous, more empty-headed than not, a paragon of good taste, slavishly devoted to her husband, and so forth. By implication, if a woman has such qualities she is good. Or, to put it another way, these are the qualities a good woman should have.

By its very nature, character does not make allowance for "individual" qualities, characteristics, or aberrations. It is an essentially ideal view and, in itself, inflexible and absolute. To apply character to a "real" person is at once to deny the individual humanity of that person. Moreover, the convention of character is not in itself a proof; it is a judgment.

To lend "authority" to his "proofs," Monticelso begins with the posture of the pious theologian who denounces Woman, the archetypal temptress and universal whore. Monticelso begins with this Woman's rebelliousness. Vittoria, he says, "A woman of a most prodigious spirit" (III,2.62), the implication being that women, in general, should not be. He moves from here to the figures of Eve and of Lot's wife:





You see my Lords what goodly fruict she  
 seemes,  
 Yet like those apples travellers report  
 To grow where Sodom and Gomora stood,  
 I will but touch her and you straight shall  
 see  
 Sheele fall to soote and ashes.  
 (III.2.66)

Furthermore, Monticelso is

resolved  
 Were there a second Paradice to loose  
 This devell would betray it.  
 (III.2.71ff)

But Monticelso has not presented proof that Vittoria is the archetypally weak woman and temptress. He has presented a judgment. Monticelso's argument is based on certain theological assumptions that woman is weak and, in her weakness, has betrayed and continues to betray man. But an assumption is not a proof. It is a premise which remains to be proved. Moreover, in suggesting that Vittoria is the archetypal temptress, Monticelso is trying her not as Vittoria, not as an individual human being, but as a representative type of woman.

Having established in the minds of the judges the idea that Vittoria is the incarnation of the Weak Woman and the archetypal Temptress, he proceeds to picture her as the universal Whore. Impassionedly, Monticelso delivers a scathing character-picture of whores and, by association, of Vittoria:

MON. Shall I expound whore to you? sure I  
 shal;  
 Ile give their perfect character. They are  
 first,  
 Sweete meates which rot the eater: In mans  
 nostrill  
 Poison'd perfumes. They are coosning Alcumy,





Shipwrackes in Calmest weather. What are  
 Whores?  
 Cold Russian winters, that appeare so barren,  
 As if that nature had forgot the spring.  
 They are the trew materiall fier of hell,  
 Worse then those tributes ith low count-  
 ries payed,  
 Exactions upon meat, drinke, garments,  
 sleepe,  
 I even on mans perdition, his sin.  
 They are those brittle evidences of law  
 Which forfeit all a wrethched mans estate  
 For leaving out one sillable. What are  
 whores  
 They are those flattering bells have all one  
 tune  
 At weddings, and at funerals: your ritch  
 whores  
 Are only treasuries by extortion fild,  
 And empt[i]ed by curs'd riot. They are  
 worse,  
 Worse then dead bodies, which are beg'd at  
 gallowes,  
 And wrought upon by surgeons, to teach man  
 Wherin hee is imperfect. Whats a whore?  
 Shees like the guilty counterfett'd coine  
 Which who so eare first stamps, bring[s] in  
 trouble  
 All that receave it. VIT. This carracter  
 scapes me.

(III.2.82)

The scope of Monticelso's eloquence is admirable, but it is  
 beside the point. Monticelso has not proved Vittoria a whore; by a  
 subtle process of association he has judged her so. For the ambassadors,  
 however, Monticelso's character-picture is very much to the point.  
 Monticelso has a fortuitous set of circumstances working for him.  
 Delivered in a "courtroom," associated with Vittoria's flashing temper,  
 her "prodigious spirit," her refusal to be intimidated by "authority,"  
 and combined with enough gossip about her reputation, Monticelso's  
 remarks produce in the ambassadors the desired effect:



FR. EMB. Shee hath lived ill.

ENG. EMB. Trew,...

Implicit in Monticelso's attack is the denial of Vittoria's humanity, the denial of her existence as a particular human individual. Vittoria is manifestly aware of this, and remarks:

to the most worthy and respected  
Leigier Embassadors, my modesty  
And womanhood I tender; but withall  
So intangled in a cursed accusation  
That my defence of force like Perseus  
Must personate masculine vertue--To the  
point!  
Find mee but guilty, sever head from body:  
Weele part good frindes: I scorne to hould  
my life  
At yours or any mans intreaty, Sir.  
(III.2.135)

The "cursed accusation" refers not simply to the charge on which the trial is ostensibly based, but to the accusation with which history has damned woman as the seducer of masculine virtue. Vittoria is being tried not for herself, for her own crimes, but for her inability to live up to the myth of what man expects woman to be, how he expects her to behave. Vittoria's next retort to Monticelso is an accurate description of the mechanism of this kind of projection:

These are but faigned shadowes of my evels.  
Terrify babes, my Lord, with painted devils,  
I am past such needlesse palsy--for your names,  
Of Whoore and Murdresse they proceed from you,  
As if a man should spit against the wind,  
The filth returne's in's face.  
(III.2.150)

But Monticelso is unable to see that the evil with which he charges Vittoria is his own. He has no hesitation, then, in sending Vittoria to a House of Penitent Whores: isolating, as he sees it, the





bad element of society from the good. But Monticelso's view of good and bad is illusory, and illusion, as Vittoria points out, works both ways:

It shal not be a house of convertities--  
 My minde shall make it honester to mee  
 Then the Popes Pallace, and more peaceable  
 Then thy soul, though thou art a Cardinall--  
 Know this, and let it somewhat raise your  
     spight,  
 Through darkenesse Diamonds spred their  
     ritchest light.

(III.2.300)

Vittoria's trial, then, is a most ambiguous affair, but why should she describe it as a "rape"? There is in Monticelso's prosecution of Vittoria, and in her attitude to him and to the trial in general, a strong suggestion of Vittoria's marriage to Camillo. We noted earlier that Vittoria's dream suggests a frustration of her natural desire which cannot find a place for itself in the social environment of marriage. We have yet to define the term "natural." But perhaps we can begin with Camillo. In Camillo's conversation with Flamineo, one is left with the impression that the former regards his wife in much the same way as Flamineo and Monticelso regard her--so much sexual baggage:

[FLA.]                      --How now brother!--  
 What, travailing to bed to your kind wife?  
 CAM. I assure you brother no. My voyage lyes  
 More northerlie, in a farre colder clime,  
 I do not well remember I protest  
 When I last lay with her.  
 FLA. Strange you should loose your Count.  
 CAM. Wee never lay together but eare morning  
 Their grew a flaw betweene us. FLA. 'T had  
     byn your part  
 To have made up that flaw.  
 CAM. Trew, but she loathes  
 I should be seene in't.

(I.2.48ff)





The double entendres and the epithet of "kind" point to the signification of the passage. Kind implies "natural", and accords to the wife a certain status in the marriage relationship and demands of her certain forms of behaviour. In terms of the concept of kind, it is "natural" that Vittoria is merely an item of property which Camillo bought from her father (III.2.243-246). In the same terms, Vittoria is but an instrument for the sexual gratification of her husband:

FLA. 't had byn your part  
To have made up that flaw.  
CAM. Trew,...

"Kind" means "natural," but implicit in it is the "unnatural." The concept of kind arbitrarily deprives Vittoria of her existence as an individual, of her right of consent. What is "natural" for Vittoria as a human being (who happens incidentally to be a woman) is precisely what she cannot assert in her marriage. Insofar as this deprivation is inseparable from her marriage, and insofar as this marriage is legitimized by religious and social authority, Monticelso, as the representative of this authority, is responsible for the sense of violation which Vittoria feels. Finally, insofar as her "violator" presumes to judge her, his dispensation of justice is a rape.

The framework of trial-by-judgment, however, is not confined to a formal trial scene. It informs, also, the relationship of Brachiano and Vittoria. Brachiano's response to Vittoria's dream visualizes her as the pure, innocent, and helpless victim of evil circumstance. But in the scene in the House of Convertites, Brachiano's attitude alters radically. Seeking to revenge Isabella's murder, Francisco sends to Vittoria a fraudulent "love-letter," knowing it will be intercepted





by Brachiano. Brachiano's reaction is much the same as Othello's, when Iago dangles Desdemona's handkerchief before him:

BRAC. Udsdeath, Ile cut her into Atomies  
And let th'irregular North-winde sweepe her  
up  
And blow her int' his nosthrils. Where's  
this Whore?  
FLA. What? what doe you call her?  
BRAC. Oh, I could be mad,  
Prevent the curst disease shee'l bring me to;  
And teare my haire of[f]. Where's this  
changeable stuffe?

(IV.2.43)

For Brachiano, Francisco's letter is a visible proof of Vittoria's deception, a reaction which Francisco's politic brain has carefully anticipated. But the letter is not, in fact, a proof of Vittoria's infidelity; it is merely a suggestion which remains to be proved. Brachiano, however, is as susceptible to visual "proofs" as Monticelso, as the English and French ambassadors. The sudden alteration of Brachiano's attitude, then, calls into question the extent of his perception and the nature of his love for Vittoria. How he loves her is the focus of interest:

Your beautie! O, ten thousand curses on't.  
How long have I beheld the devill in  
christall!  
Thou hast lead me, like an heathen sacrifice,  
With musicke, and with fatall yokes of  
flowers  
To my eternall ruine. Woman to man  
Is either a God or a wolfe....  
That hand, that cursed hand, which I have  
wearied  
With doting kisses! O my sweetest Dutchesse  
How lovelie art thou now! [to Vittoria] Thy  
loose thoughtes  
Scatter like quicke-silver, I was bewitch'd;  
For all the world speakes ill of thee.

(IV.2.88)





Brachiano loves Vittoria "visually." That is, he loves her for her beauty, just as, once, he had loved Isabella for her beauty. Moreover, his love for her permits him to be the heroic, self-sacrificing protector, as his response to her dream has indicated. But the nature of his love is such that, when put to the test by Francisco's letter, the picture of himself as a voluntary sacrifice is transformed into that of an involuntary sacrifice. He is now Goodman Adam, the innocent sheep, being led to the slaughter by that eternal seducer and tantalizing witch, Woman:

Thou hast lead me, like an heathen sacrifice,  
With musicke, and with fatall yokes of  
                  flowers  
To my eternall ruine.

(IV.2.90)

But Brachiano is hypnotized by a beauty and a pathos which are of his own making. Brachiano projects on Vittoria his own wished-for-  
idyll just as Othello imposes his own on Desdemona. Seeing in Vittoria the possibility of his own heroic innocence, he cannot accept in her the possibility of deception. For to accept Vittoria as a necessarily imperfect human being is to acknowledge the illusory nature of his own wished-for-perfection. But Brachiano, like the other men in the play, unconcerned with the potential obscenity of their dream, will rather sacrifice the human being to the myth. For only by such sacrifice does the myth continue to exist.

Vittoria, however, is neither meek nor passive. She does not accept without question the role of sacrificial lamb; she rejects it with every means at her disposal:





VIT. What have I gained by thee but infamie?  
 Thou hast stain'd the spotlesse honour of my  
     house,  
 And frighted thence noble societie:  
 Like those, which sicke o'th' Palsie, and re-  
     taine  
 Ill-senting foxes 'bout them, are still shun'd  
 By those of choicer nothrills. What doe you  
     call this house?  
 Is this your palace? did not the Judge stile it  
 A house of penitent whores? who sent me to  
     it?  
 Who hath the honour to advance Vittoria  
 To this incontinent colledge? is't not you?  
 Is 't not your high preferment? Go, go brag  
 How many Ladies you have undone, like mee.  
 Fare you well Sir; let me heare no more of  
     you.

(IV.2.109)

To simply accuse Vittoria of dissembling and to denounce her accordingly is to avoid the problem which the play dramatizes. There is no doubt that Vittoria, like Cleopatra, is a great actress. But to charge her with his ruin, as Brachiano does, is to overlook his own responsibility for this ruin. "Condemn you me," Vittoria asks Monticelso, "for that the Duke did love mee" (III.2.211)? And indeed, to denounce Vittoria unequivocally is to overlook the ethical implications of responsibility.

In Samson Agonistes, the Chorus unleashes an unrestrained diatribe against that creature, Woman:

Whate'er it be, to wisest men and best,  
 Seeming at first all heavenly under  
     virgin veil,  
 Soft, modest, meek, demure,  
 Once joined, the contrary she proves--  
     a thorn  
 Intestine, far within defensive arms  
 A cleaving mischief, in his way to vir-  
     tue



Adverse and turbulent; or by her charms  
 Draws him awry, enslaved  
 With dotage, and his sense depraved  
 To folly and shameful deeds, which ruin  
     ends.  
 What pilot so expert but needs must wreck,  
 Embarked with such a steers-mate at the  
     helm.

(Samson Agonistes, 1034)

The Chorus sees Dalila as the representative of Woman and Woman as the eternal seducer of man's virtue. But the Chorus is not seeing the human being. It is seeing Woman as defined by a myth. By affirming the myth, the Chorus implicitly disclaims man's responsibility in human relationships. And by sacrificing woman to the myth, it asserts the validity of that myth. But Samson, ultimately, sees what the chorus does not: the extent of his own responsibility. He accuses Dalila of particulars where the Chorus does not. There is no denying Dalila's guilt. But in the same terms, there is no denying his own.

In the case of The White Devil, Vittoria articulates her dream to Brachiano. The way in which Brachiano interprets the dream is his responsibility: "Sweetly shall I enterpret this your dream..." (I.2.249). And the action which he takes on the basis of this interpretation is his responsibility also. Vittoria's responsibility increases only to the extent that she manipulates Brachiano:

BRAC. Give credit: I could wish time would  
     stand still  
 And never end this interview, this however,  
 But all delight doth itself soon'st devour.  
 Let me into your bosome happy Ladie,  
 Powre out instead of eloquence my vows--  
 Loose me not Madam, for if you forego me  
 I am lost eternallie. VIT. Sir in the way of  
     pittie





I wish you hart-hole. BRAC. You are a sweet  
Phisition.

VIT. Sure Sir a loathed crueltie in Ladyes  
Is as to Doctors many funeralls:  
It takes away their credit. BRAC. Excellent  
creature.

Wee call the cruell fayre, what name for you  
That are so mercifull? ZAN. See now they  
close.

FLA. Most happie union...

BRA. What valem is this Jewell? VIT. Tis the  
ornament

Of a weake fortune.

BRA. In sooth ile have it; nay I will but change  
My Jewell for your Jewell. FLAM. Excellent,  
His Jewell for her Jewell, well put in Duke.

BRAC. Nay let me see you weare it. VIT. [Here]  
Sir?

BRAC. Nay lower, you shall weare my Jewell lower.

FLAM. That's better, she must weare his Jewell  
lower.

(I.2.192)

But who, in fact, is manipulating whom? Of course, one can "play" Vittoria as the Mamie Van Doren of "Girls' Town," but such casting denies those many other qualities of wit and spirit which make Vittoria so striking a woman. In the context of the play, it is enough that Vittoria is beautiful and sexually desirable. There is ample evidence in the text that the male characters need only look at her to formulate their own opinions--without any help from Vittoria.

It is precisely this which Vittoria has tried to point out to Monticelso and which she is trying to show to Brachiano. Vittoria is demanding the recognition of herself not as a type, but as a human being who is incidentally a woman: a woman who is beautiful and sexually desirable, and conscious of it; a woman who can exploit, if necessary, her sexual attributes, her wiles, her wit, her spirit, as no doubt she





does in the trial scene and in the scenes with Brachiano. And if she dissembles overmuch, as no doubt she does, if she "personates masculine vertue," this does not negate her own point of view and her own frustration.

Vittoria's frustration lies in the demands, both implicit and explicit, that she live out not simply her own necessities as a human being, but also the roles of "Womanhood," "purity," "innocence," which other people impose upon her. Vittoria dissembles so frequently because it is one of the few ways she has of fighting back, of trying to be herself: "I scorne to hould my life / At yours or any mans intreaty" (III.2.142ff), she says to Monticelso. Vittoria is like Hardy's Tess who must constantly remind Angel Clare to "Call me Tess," not Artemis, nor Demeter, nor the names of man's wished-for-innocence and, that failing as inevitably it must, the names of his own guilt which he refuses to accept.<sup>3</sup> Vittoria demands from Brachiano and from Monticelso the recognition of herself as a human being, both good and bad, strong and weak, noble and petty; both aspects existing together and existing inseparably.

But what Brachiano has been unable to learn from Isabella and Vittoria, he learns in the few moments before his own death. His death scene brings together all the ironies of good and evil, of love and death, which he has been unable, or has refused, to see. In the death scene, Gasparo and Lodovico, disguised as Capuchin monks, give Brachiano the last rites. And as the others leave the room Gasparo and Lodovico unmask:



GAS. This is Count Lodovico. LOD. This, Gasparo.  
And thou shalt die like a poore rogue. GAS. And  
stinke

Like a dead flie-blowne dog.

LOD. And be forgotten before thy funerall sermon.

BRA. Vittoria! Vittoria! LOD. O the cursed devill,  
Come to himselfe again! Wee are undone.

Enter Vittoria and attendants.

GAS. Strangle him in private. What, will you call him  
again

To live in treble torments? for charitie,  
For Christian charitie, avoid the chamber.

[Exuent]

LOD. You would prate, Sir. This is a true-love knot  
Sent from the Duke of Florence.

Brachiano is strangled.

(V.3.166)

Like the masks of Gasparo and Lodovico, Brachiano's dream of innocence is a mask which conceals beneath it evil and desolation and death. It conceals that which the human being refuses to face: his own imperfection, his own responsibility, his own mortality. "Man," in Beckett's Waiting for Godot, "is born astride a tomb," and the unmasking discloses that tomb. And with the unmasking, Brachiano, like Lear, recognizes that man is the perpetrator of his own misery, that "none does offend:"

VII. O my good Lord! BRA. Away, you have  
abus'd mee.

You have convayed coyne forth our territories;  
Bought and sold offices; oppres'd the poore,  
And I nere dreamt on't. Make up your  
accountes;

Ile now bee mine owne Steward. FLA. Sir, have  
patience.

BRA. Indeed I am [to] blame.

For did you ever heare the duskie raven  
Chide blacknesse? or was't ever knowne, the  
divell

Raild against cloven Creatures?...

Yonders a fine slave come in now. FLA.

Where?

BRA. Why there.

In a blew bonnet, and a paire of breeches





With a great codpeece. Ha, ha, ha,  
 Looke you his codpeece is stuck full of pinnes  
 With pearles o'th head of them. Doe not you  
 know him?

FLA, No, my Lord, BRA, Why 'tis the Devill....

VIT, My Lord heer's nothing.  
 BRA, Nothing? rare! nothing! when I want  
 monie,  
 Our treasurie is emptie; there is nothing,...

See, see Flamineo that kill'd his brother,  
 Is dancing on the ropes there: and he carries  
 A monie-bag in each hand, to keepe him even,  
 For feare of breaking's necke. And there's a  
 Lawyer  
 In a gowne whipt with velvet, stares and  
 gapes  
 When the money will fall....  
 (V.3.82ff)

All men are levelled before the universality of human corruption, Brachiano satirizes human greed and the futility of human activity: Flamineo, dancing on the tightrope, with the money-bags in both hands. He satirizes human self-deception which, unable or unwilling to face the facts of man's nature, blinds the human being with the illusion of purity or beauty or innocence. In the final analysis, the "codpeece stuck with pearles" and "the gowne whipt with velvet" will not conceal human greed or sexuality or mortality. Man's evasions are absurd, but the most profound absurdity is that death renders even recognition null and void. Ultimately, there is only a silence.

The discussion of the trial framework brings up several interesting points. While Vittoria is no doubt culpable, she is also sacrificed to the altars of Caesar and God. The social institution of marriage and the myth of masculine virtue severely delimit and debase Vittoria. The contest in the trial is not so much between right and





wrong as between how and how not to live one's life. Vittoria is highly individualistic, very much inner-directed. She "scorne[s] to hould [her] life / At...any mans entreaty" (III.2.142ff). She refuses to live according to the wishes of other people, according to the formalized conventions of these wishes, according to the injunctions, if you like, of Caesar and God. She insists on being herself, whatever that may be, and finding in herself her own reward. The trial framework, finally, cancels itself out because it is the servant not of justice, but of the formalized conventions against which Vittoria rebels. The frame of reference which informs these conventions is not a visible proof of the one true way to live one's life--that the human being must first and foremost subordinate himself to external demands is at best an assumption which remains to be proved--it is at best one of perhaps several alternatives, another of which is Vittoria's primarily individual consciousness. The contest between ways of life or being, which reaches its climax in the confrontation of Vittoria and Flamineo in the final scene of The White Devil, is the subject of the next chapter.



## CHAPTER V

### THE DANCE OF DEATH

Flamineo, like Francisco, serves two masters, Caesar and God. But Flamineo serves them through the single character of his sister Vittoria. In his eyes, Vittoria assumes a sort of doubleness of being, a dual significance: she is at once Whore and Angel, or, in the title of the play, a White Devil. But she is not in his eyes a person. Flamineo's response to Vittoria's trial will serve as a starting point:

FRE. [EMB.] The proofes [of Vittoria's guilt] are evident.  
FLA. Proofs! 'twas corruption. O Gold, what a God art thou! and ô man, what a devill art thou to be tempted by that cursed Minerall! Yo[n] diversivolt Lawyer; marke him, knaves turne informers, as maggots turne to flies, you may catch gudgeons with either. A Cardinall; would hee would heare mee, theres nothing so holie but mony will corrupt and putrifie it, like vittell under the line.

[Enter] English Ambassador.

You are happie in England, my Lord; here they sell justice with those weights they presse men to death with. O horrible salarie!  
(III.3.18)

Flamineo's utterance is interesting because it unites in itself many of his characteristics and attitudes. It is satiric and sententious. It illustrates his preoccupation with gold and the inseparability of this preoccupation from his sister, Vittoria. It is the product of a "madde humor" which he feigns "for the disgrace of [his] sister" (III.2.316). It is interesting, also, because it does not harp on Vittoria's corruption, but rather on her innocence.

Wherever in the play Flamineo believes that he will get some sort of reward from Brachiano, he uses the sententious utterance to satirize





the universal corruption of women and, by implication, of Vittoria.

In Act I, for example, he says to Brachiano:

FLA. 'bove merri't! wee may now talke freely: 'bove merri't!  
 what ist you doubt? her coynesse? thats but the superficies  
 of lust most women have; yet why should Ladyes blush to heare  
 that nam'd, which they do not feare to handle? O they are  
 polliticke, They know our desire is increas'd by the difficultie  
 of injoying; [whereas] satiety is a blunt, weary and drowsie  
 passion--if the buttery hatch at court stood continually open  
 their would be nothing so passionat crouding, nor hot suit after  
 the beverage--...

(I.2.16)

And later, in Act IV, he remarks, "Women are caught as you take  
 Tortoises, / Shee must bee turn'd on her backe" (IV.2.154). Flamineo  
 makes such references liberally throughout The White Devil. But when  
 his chances of getting any reward from Brachiano appear remote,  
 Flamineo reacts violently to any suggestion of Vittoria's guilt or  
 corruption. Immediately after the trial scene, for example, Flamineo  
 watches Brachiano shake hands with his arch-enemy, Francisco. In the  
 very next scene, the remarks of the French ambassador provoke in  
 Flamineo a violent rebuttal (III.3.18). In the scene which follows,  
 Lodovico calls Vittoria a whore and Flamineo strikes him across the  
 face (III.3.106). A similar situation occurs in the House of  
 Convertites after Brachiano has intercepted Francisco's "love-letter"  
 to Vittoria. When Brachiano calls Vittoria a whore, Flamineo casts  
 aside all discretion:

[BRA.] Where's this whore?

FLA. What? what doe you call her?

BRA. Oh, I could bee mad,

Prevent the curst disease shee'l bring mee  
 to;

And teare my haire of[f]. Where's this  
 changeable stuffe?





FLA. Ore head and eares in water, I assure  
you,

Shee is not for your wearing. BRA. [In] you  
Pander!

FLA. What mee, my Lord, am I your dog?

BRA. A bloud-hound: doe you brave? doe you  
stand mee?

FLA. Stand you? let those that have diseases  
run;

I need no plaisters. BRA. Would you bee kickt?

FLA. Would you have your necke broke?

I tell you Duke, I am not in Russia;

My shinnes must be kept whole.

(IV.2.45)

On an immediate level, gold and Vittoria exist together in Flamineo's mind because Vittoria is his ticket to a higher standard of living. Flamineo's preoccupation with gold, that is, with material reward, is rooted in his poverty, which he attributes to his father's foolish honesty; in the years of humiliation which he suffered while a student at the university; in the acquisition in court service not of money, but of trivial values and a practised lecherousness (I.2. 301-38). Brachiano wants Vittoria and, presumably, will pay to get her. Flamineo can deliver her.

Flamineo has no compunction about pandering Vittoria because she is a woman and, in his experience, all women are whores. He is himself, after all, the victim of sexual deception:

FLA. I must not have your Lordship thus unwisely amorous--I my selfe have loved a lady and peursued her with a great deale of under-age protestation, whom some 3. or 4. gallants that have enjoyed would with all their harts have bin glad to have bin rid of: 'Tis just like a summer bird-cage in a garden, the birds that are without, despaire to get in, and the birds that are within despaire and are in a consumption for feare they shall never get out:...

(I.2.37)





Moreover, in spite of her marriage to Camillo, Vittoria does not object to Flamineo's prosecution of Brachiano's suit. Having once resolved to use Vittoria, Flamineo has now to convince himself, and Brachiano, and the theatre audience of the "rightness" of his behaviour. He does so in his satiric peep show and with his constant iteration of sexually charged sententiae.

The peep show is a useful medium for Flamineo's purposes because it purports to present "proofs" which are visible to the eye as well as to the ear. In his opening peep show (I.2.1-190), Flamineo seeks to justify his behaviour by proving Vittoria's husband, Camillo, a fool. Scene: Brachiano is hiding in the closet; the audience is peeping in from offstage. Enter Camillo who probably has many qualities in common with the fops in Hamlet and I Henry IV. To get Camillo out of the way of a meeting between Vittoria and Brachiano, Flamineo convinces Camillo that the best way to regain his wife's affections is to remain aloof, to refuse to sleep with her. Camillo, of course, agrees. And to assure Flamineo that he will not weaken, Camillo suggests that the former lock him into his bedroom and keep the key. The generic medium of sententiae is equally useful because it carries with it connotations of "authority" and of historical precedence. To say in this medium, for example, that Vittoria is a whore, is to suggest at the same time that this is not only a personal opinion, but the judgment of history and authority as well.<sup>1</sup>

While Flamineo's satire may convince him and Brachiano of the "rightness" of pandering Vittoria, it may not so convince the audience.





Flammineo's satire works against him and against itself. First, it calls into question the frame of reference from which his satire proceeds. This referential frame is that the end justifies the means. The end is reward for serving Caesar. But even the service of Caesar does not justify the degradation of another human being. Second, the peep show itself is obscene. Certainly, Camillo is a fool and a pompous ass. Certainly, the audience may feel no pity for Camillo. But it may see that the peep show is a dirty trick, made not only at Camillo's expense but at the expense of the audience as well. That is, the audience sanctions with its laughter the point of view of Flammineo.<sup>2</sup>

The convention of sententious utterance similarly deflates itself and its frame of reference. While sententiae carry with them the weight of authority and history, they are very similar in quality to the genre of character. Like character, the convention of sententiae is a species of broad and anonymous generalization. It denies the human being as an individual person and sees him, instead, as an abstraction called "Mankind" or "Woman." It is, like character, a set of expectations arbitrarily created and arbitrarily imposed and, like character, as tyrannical in its effects.

Flammineo's satire and the obsessive sexual preoccupation of his satire, however, point up other considerations. Satire is an intellectual ordering of experience. It presupposes an ideal to be attained. It projects the vision of a "better" world toward which the human being should aspire. The kind of better world which Flammineo seeks is suggested





by his preoccupation with the sexual corruption of others. In Vittoria's dream, for example, Flamineo sees visual proof that woman is the source of sexual deception, lost innocence, and death. Flamineo's own experience emphasizes for him this point of view (I.2.37). The peep show, which carries with it the suggestion of audience approval, and the sententiae, which carry with them the weight of authority and history, further augment this point of view. But implicit in all these rationalizations, there is also Flamineo's projection of a wished-for-innocence, once had, now lost, but against which Flamineo measures both himself and others. That Flamineo does wish this better world and that Vittoria is the agent through whom he pursues it is developed further in the play.

Flamineo has an almost Swiftian consciousness and horror of human corruption and the universality of the world's evil. For Flamineo, evil is a fact of life and a fact of nature (I.2.341). Unlike Vittoria and Brachiano who reject outright the "evil" which oppresses them Flamineo sees the evil around him as inescapable:

FLAM. He [the doctor] will shoot pills into a man's guts, shall make them have more ventage then a cornet or a lamprey, hee will poyson a kisse, and was once minded for his Master-peece, because Ireland breeds no poyson, to have prepared a deadly vapour on a Spaniards fart that should have poison'd all Dublin.

BRAC. O Saint Anthony fire!

DOCT. Your Secretary is merry my Lord:

FLAM. O thou accursed antipathy to nature--looke his eye's bloud-shed like a needle a Chirurgeon stitcheth a wound with--let me embrace thee toad & love thee o thou abominable loathsome gargarisme, that will fetch up lungs, lights, heart, and liver by scruples.

(II.1.296)



The images of loathsomeness and physical corruption are terrifying. But in the horror of the passage there reside the universal questions of a man at the edge of the precipice. Must the human being embrace gratuitously the evil of this world in spite of, because of, and through his revulsion from it? Is there no reward for such embrace? Is the lot of the human being nothing more than to suffer; to endure misery and humiliation? Does not such suffering, such deprivation, presuppose some rationale, some reward, in a greater scheme of things? To "embrace [this] toad & love [this] abominable loathsome gargarisme" without the promise of reward is surely madness, surely absurd.

The traditional answer in its broadest and most general terms is to serve both Caesar and God and to hope for the best. But the best, as Flamineo learns, seems not destined to come in this world. Again and again, Flamineo is disappointed by Brachiano. And as the hope for material reward wanes, Flamineo turns more and more to the hope of a Paradise Regained. This is made especially clear in the confrontation between Flamineo and Lodovico immediately after Vittoria's trial.

Flamineo and Lodovico despise each other. The one is working for Brachiano and the other for Francisco, both of whom are sworn enemies. When Flamineo and Lodovico do come together, it is only to find out what makes the other tick:

LOD. [aside] This was Brachiano's Pandar, and  
           'tis strange  
 That in such open and apparent guilt  
 Of his adulterous sister, hee dare utter  
 So scandalous a passion. I must wind him.





Enter Flamineo

FLA. [aside] How dares this banish't Count  
 returne to Rome,  
 His pardon not yet purchast? I have heard  
 The deceast Dutchesse gave him pension,  
 And that he came along from Padua  
 I'th' traine of the yong Prince. There's some-  
 what in't.  
 Phisitians, that cure poisons, still doe worke  
 With counterpoisons.  
 MAR. Marke this strange incounter.  
 FLA. The God of Melancholie turne thy gall to  
 poison,  
 And let the stigmaticke wrincles in thy face,  
 Like to the boisterous waves in a rough tide  
 One still overtake another. LOD. I doe  
 thanke thee  
 And I doe wish ingeniously for thy sake  
 The dog-daies all yeare long.  
 (III.3.50)

But there is a jar in the overall scene. While the content of their  
 encounter suggests the universe of court values and political  
 manoeuvring, the frame of the scene suggests an entirely different  
 kind of universe:

FLA. How crokes the raven?  
 Is our good Dutchesse dead? LOD. Dead. FLA.  
 O fate!  
 Misfortune comes like the Crowners businesse,  
 Huddle upon huddle.  
 LOD. Shalt thou & I joyne housekeeping? FLA.  
 Yes, content.  
 Let's be unsociably sociable....LOD. Pretious  
 [rogue]!  
 Weel never part. FLA. Never: till the beggerie  
 of Courtiers,  
 The discontent of church-men, want of  
 souldiers,  
 And all the creatures that hang manacled,  
 Worse then strappado'd, on the lowest fellie  
 Of fortunes wheele bee taught in our two lives  
 To scorne that world which life of meanes de-  
 prives.

(III.3.68)





Flamineo and Lodovico are brought together by Isabella's death.

Flamineo is out of fortune; his chances for some sort of political reward are unpromising; he is in the court dumps. He and Lodovico, who is also out of favor, pledge in their adversity an eternal melancholy friendship. Enter Antonio with news of Lodovico's restoration to court favor. Flamineo's fortune is worse than ever and, provoked by Lodovico's happiness, Flamineo insults him. Lodovico calls Vittoria a whore and Flamineo strikes him across the face.

The frame of the scene suggests the medieval morality play, Everyman. In the spiritual universe of that play, Everyman is summoned to the Last Judgment. As he walks in his loneliness and adversity along the road of this life, he encounters Good Fellowship, who is every man's fair weather friend:

FELLOWSHIP. Everyman, good morrow; by this day!

Sir, why lookest thou so piteously?  
If anything be amiss, I pray me say,  
That I may help to remedy.

EVERYMAN. Yea, good Fellowship, yea,  
I am in great jeopardy.

FELLOWSHIP. My true friend, show to me  
your mind;

I will not forsake thee, unto my life's end,  
In the way of good company.

EVERYMAN. Verily, Fellowship, gramercy.

FELLOWSHIP. Tush! by thy thanks I set not a  
straw!

Show me your grief and say no more.

EVERYMAN. If I my heart should to you break,  
And then you to turn your mind from me,  
And would not comfort when you hear me speak,  
Then should I ten times sorrier be.

FELLOWSHIP. Sir, I say as I will do in deed.

EVERYMAN. Then be you a good friend at need;  
I have found you true herebefore.



FELLOWSHIP. And so you shall evermore.

For, in faith, an thou go to hell

I will not forsake thee by the way.

EVERYMAN. Ye speak like a good friend; I believe you well;

I shall deserve it, and I may.

FELLOWSHIP. ...show me the grief of your mind,

As to your friend most loving and kind.

EVERYMAN. I shall show you how it is:

Commanded I am to go on a journey,

A long way, hard and dangerous,

And give a straight count without delay

Before the high judge, Adonay.

Wherefore, I pray you, bear me company,

As ye have promised in this journey.

(Everyman, 206 et seq.)

Fellowship, of course, refuses to accompany Everyman, and his refusal is a silent satiric commentary on the illusory nature of the promises of this world and the promises of men. In the Everyman universe, however, the recognition of the illusory nature of this world is but a prelude to the recognition of the "realness" of the otherworld, of the promises of God. Flamineo's experience of this world is very much like that of Everyman. More and more, Flamineo loses confidence in Brachiano's promises. More and more, he turns to the promises of a spiritual universe. But he does so through Vittoria, the universal whore, and in the guise of madness.

Flamineo assumes the mask of madness to protest Vittoria's innocence and goodness when there appears to be overwhelming evidence to the contrary. By implication, to believe Vittoria innocent and good, or the agent of innocence and goodness, is to be mad. To believe at all is to be mad. But the mask of madness, like the convention of disguise, permits Flamineo to "act out" the psychological possibility of innocence and





goodness and belief.<sup>3</sup> All these elements are brought together, finally, in the last scene of The White Devil.

The final scene (V,6) is horrific and sensational.<sup>4</sup> But the horror and sensation cohere imaginatively and dramatically to the issues at hand. The situation of the scene is briefly this. Enter Flamineo, Vittoria with a prayer book in her hands, and Zanche. With Brachiano dead and Vittoria named his executrice, Flamineo seeks from Vittoria a suitable reward for his services to her lover. Vittoria refuses and denounces Flamineo for killing his brother, Marcello. Flamineo produces two pistols, which he calls "jewels," echoing Brachiano's play on the word in Act I. He proposes to kill Vittoria and then himself. Convinced, finally, that he is serious, Vittoria, in an appropriate little speech, declares herself ready. Zanche, however, suggests that Flamineo first show Vittoria how to die. Flamineo agrees after exacting from both women the promise that they will kill each other afterward. Flamineo recites appropriate dying words about hell, purgatory, cobbling, garlic, and selling apples. The women shoot him, then tread on him, calling out all sorts of horrible imprecations. They tell Flamineo they will not take their own lives after all. Flamineo leaps up triumphantly, tells them the pistols were loaded with blanks, and that the whole mad affair was simply a device to prove their "kindness." Literally, the situation of the last scene is that of a courtier who, disappointed too often in his hopes for political reward, seeks to revenge himself on the one who frustrates him. But the frame of the scene, like the framework in III,3, is that of a morality play.





Integral to the morality tradition is the acting out of the danse macabre, the dance of death. Everyman is perhaps the most consummate expression of the danses, whose theme is memento mori, remember you must die. In the Everyman play, Everyman has been summoned by death and must prepare a reckoning for the Final Judgment. There is a profound pathos in Everyman's recognition that all his worldly attributes and possessions, Fellowship, Kindred, Worldly Goods, Knowledge, Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and the Five Wits, have deserted him, that they are illusions. In the face of Death, Everyman is alone except for his Good Deeds. But Everyman has "lived through" the illusion of the material world and of worldly promises. And for him, there is a compensation: a God of love who watches over him and takes him across the threshold of death into the "real" world. With this consciousness of God's love, Everyman dances into the grave, for the dance is a metaphor of affirmation of the ultimate harmony of human existence.

The final scene of The White Devil has much of the drama, but none of the promise, of the medieval dance of death. Flamineo, like Everyman, has an apprehension of death. After killing his brother Marcello, in a "duel," Flamineo is visited by Brachiano's ghost which throws earth on him and shows him a skull (Cf.V.4.118). Flamineo resolves to prepare the final reckoning which is presented in the last scene of the play. This final scene dramatizes the illusory nature of the promises of this world, the fear and horror of death, the promise of regeneration, and the "dance" into the grave. But the whole scene is an hysterical parody of the absurdity of death itself and of the





convention of the dance of death. Flamineo is using the convention, ironically, to satirize itself, to disclose its expectations and promises as obsolete and impossible.

But implicit in Flamineo's horrific parody is a formidable challenge to Vittoria. If Vittoria but dare to "live out" the scene which he has structured, then she shall have "saved" him. That is to say, by agreeing to the "sacrifice," Vittoria will be affirming the validity of Flamineo's wished-for-innocence. She will be affirming that there was, in fact, an Eden, that man was once indeed innocent and woman the cause of his downfall, and that this lost innocence and paradise may be regained. Flamineo's test says to Vittoria, if you are really a woman, really my sister, and if you truly love me, then you will live out your life as I believe life should be. But Flamineo's request is excessive and terrifyingly unfair. Vittoria, of course, refuses, and her wild stamping on Flamineo serves only to emphasize the horror and unreasonableness of his demands.

Flamineo's error is that he projects onto his sister his own despair, his own search for meaning, mistaking it for hers. But Vittoria's despair is not Flamineo's. Hers is the terrible burden of having to live out the roles and obligations imposed on her by others; the refusal of others to recognize in her a human being subject to her own necessities. If, finally, Vittoria must accept these injunctions external to herself, then she must do so on her own terms, affirming everything she is: woman, actress, sextemptress, all. When Lodovico and Gasparo hold their knives to her throat, she exploits to the hilt.











VIT. O my greatest sinne lay  
in my blood.  
Now my blood paies for't.

(V.6.240)

Flamineo moves, ultimately, to the recognition of a total point of view which parallels closely the point of view of the dramatist. And with this recognition, there remains for Flamineo only the acceptance of a long silence. It is the silence not only of death. It is also the stilled voice of the satirist which recognizes in the humanity and the suffering of another human being the vanity and absurdity of its own wishes, the tyranny which its own dreams and its own myths and its own evasions exercise on others:

Th'art a noble sister,  
I love thee now; if woeman do breed man,  
She ought to teach him manhood: Fare thee  
well.  
Know many glorious woemen that are fam'd  
For masculine virtue, have bin vitious,  
Onely a happier silence did betyde them.  
She hath no faults who hath the art to  
hide them.

(V.6.241)

Flamineo, like Job before him, has no answers. Job asks, Why do I suffer? And he learns only that all men suffer. But he learns, also, of his own culpability, of his own littleness, and of the severely limited nature of all his knowledge and the illusory nature of all his dreams:

VIT. My soule, like to a ship in a blacke  
storme,  
Is driven I know not whither. FLA. Then cast  
ancor.  
"Prosperity doth bewitch men seeming cleare,  
"But Seas doe laugh, shew white, when Rocks  
are neere.  
"Wee cease to greive, cease to be fortunes  
slaves,









[LOD.] What dost thinke on?  
FLA. Nothing; of nothing: leave thy idle  
questions,  
I am ith way to study a long silence,  
To prate were idle, I remember nothing.  
Theres nothing of so inifinit vexation  
As mans owne thoughts.

(V.6.202ff)





## CHAPTER VI

### THE TRAGIC FORMULA AND THE THEATRE AUDIENCE

I have now to summarize my remarks about Webster's use of dramatic convention, how these conventions constitute the point of view of the play, and how this point of view is related to the response of the theatre audience. Webster's point of view is defined first by the nature of the individual conventions and, second by the disposition of these conventions throughout the play. Let us begin with the latter consideration.

Each of the conventions is a dramatic moment. That is, it is the realization in a moment of time of a complex of ideas, of expectations, of feelings, of insights which is central to the play. While each convention is part of the surrounding "action" of the play, it differs from the action in this way. The actions are temporal. That is, they are linear and sequential, one action succeeding another in time. The individual conventions, while part of the action which occurs in time, exist also unto themselves and are apprehended by the theatre audience in a moment of time. They exist, as St. Paul said, in the fullness of time, hence they are atemporal or outside of time. The conventions are images, if you like, of that which is fundamental to human nature: good and evil, love and hate, life and death. These are timeless by virtue of their eternal recurrence in time. The action is a particularized acting out of these fundamental qualities. The convention is the universalized crystallization of these qualities.



The first way, then, in which Webster steers or guides the response of the theatre audience is by causing the audience to look at the play in two ways: in time and outside of time, particularized and universalized. The audience is seeing in time the acting out of that which, by virtue of its eternal reenactment, is timeless. This reenactment is the "story" which the audience is left with and which Flamineo, as much a "story-teller" as the dramatist, summarizes at the end of the play:

VIT. O happy they that never saw the Court,  
 "Nor ever knew great Man but by  
 report.

FLA. I recover like a spent taper, for a  
 flash

And instantly go out.

Let all that belong to Great men remember th'ould  
 wives tradition, to be like the Lyons ith Tower on  
 Candlemas day, to mourne if the Sunne shine, for  
 feare of the pitifull remainder of winter to  
 come.

'Tis well yet there's some goodnesse in my death,  
 My life was a blacke charnell: I have caught  
 An everlasting could. I have lost my voice  
 Most irrecoverably: Farewell glorious villaines,  
 "This busie trade of life appeares most vaine,  
 "Since rest breeds rest, where all seeke paine  
 by paine.

Let no harsh flattering Bels resound my knell,  
 Strike thunder, and strike lowde to my fare-  
 well.

(V.6.261)

"Let all that belong to great men," says Flamineo, "remember th'ould wives tradition,..." The tale must be told and retold, as the story of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner must be told and retold, so that the audience may "remember":





Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched  
 With a woful agony,  
 Which forced me to begin my tale;  
 And then it left me free.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,  
 That agony returns:  
 And till my ghastly tale is told,  
 This heart within me burns.

I pass, like night, from land to land;  
 I have strange power of speech;  
 The moment that his face I see,  
 I know the man that must hear me:  
 To him my tale I teach.

("The...Ancient Mariner," 578)

The silence of which Flamineo speaks is the silence which signals the "end" of the story. But, like the silence of the mariner, it is "uncertain," temporary. Ultimately it is told again and then again, and the audience, like the captive audience of Coleridge's Mariner, "cannot choose but hear..." ("Ancient Mariner", 18).

But Webster informs this "hearing continuously", that is, he disposes his conventions "spatially" throughout the play, so that they are much like the images superimposed on--but singularly part of--the time sequence of, for example, an Ingmar Bergman film. The effect of this is again to stress the "remembering." But what is it that the audience is asked to remember and how is this injunction to remember related to the "nature" of the conventions which Webster uses?

I have suggested that each convention unites<sup>in</sup> itself diverse and contradictory responses and expectations to make up a "total" or complete point of view. This point of view consists largely in crystallizing in a moment of time certain fundamental aspects of human experience. A model for this kind of ordering could be Beckett's phrase





in Waiting for Godot: "Man is born astride a tomb." Or it could be Donne's phrase in "The Relique": "And he that digs it, spies / A bracelet of bright haire about the bone." The effect is immediate and often shocking. But both the immediacy and the shock produce the recognition of a new point of view, of a new way of looking at things. This recognition of a more complete point of view shows our traditional responses and expectations to be limited and often defective, thus deflating the traditional frames of reference from which our judgments and satiric commentaries proceed. Moreover, our traditional frameworks are shown to be tyrannical insofar as they take no cognizance of views outside of themselves. This undercutting of the satiric impulse demands a suspension of overhasty judgment or condemnation, a suspension which both permits and is the product of the recognition of an essential kinship between the audience and that which is dramatized in the convention. For example, the convention of the Papal Election deals with good and evil, with life and death, simply to remind us that we are all subject to the same weaknesses, that we are all subject to death, that all men are children of the same father and mother. The recognition of this kinship allows frequently for pity--even for such a man as the Cardinal Monticelso. Where there is such pity, there is the stress on yet another factor: that is the tyranny of our own points of view, our own myths, dreams, projections, expectations. For we, as part of the audience, do "sacrifice" to our expectations each of the characters in the play, just as the characters in the play sacrifice each other. And for much the same reasons: to test, to determine, the





validity of all our myths, dreams, expectations, and points of view. There is another consideration.

Having made the "sacrifice," we have no affirmation of our myths, or dreams, or expectations. Indeed, all these are shown to be illusory, figments of the human imagination. There is not possible the affirmation of such reward as is promised--and given--in the divine comedy of Everyman. That play asks the audience to remember that one day we must all die. Consequently, how we live our lives and how we face our death is important. But for all its importance, it is subordinate to the end to which it is directed. That is, how we live our lives in the Everyman world is important only because it enables us to affirm that beyond the threshold of suffering and disillusion and death there is meaning. There is a reason for the human condition being what it is, there is a reward beyond death which defeats death itself. In the world of The White Devil, however, how one lives one's life is important precisely because there is nothing else. There is nothing beyond death to affirm. There is no meaning, no reason, no reward.

There remains now to summarize my main points. Webster locates the ethical and dramatic core of The White Devil not in a tragic hero but in the minor dramatic conventions which I have discussed. This location permits him a point of view which is considerably wider than that of any single character in the play. The emphasis, therefore, is on how far the "action" of the character leads him to a recognition of this greater point of view. The spatial disposition of





these conventions, moreover, enables Webster to carry his ethical argument from beginning to end without being limited either to the point of view or to the "accidents" of a single character. It enables him, also, to guide and inform consistently the responses of his theatre audience, to remind the theatre audience of the need to "act out" again and again this timeless and universal subject, of the need to tell and retell the tale.

The locating of the ethical centre of the play in the minor conventions rather than in character points up, also, the impossibility of satire in the world of The White Devil. It discloses the breakdown of traditional referential frames from which there proceeds the impulse to satirize and to pass judgment. Moreover, it permits the audience to recognize a kinship even with evil and this recognition in turn permits pity: pity for our own kinship with suffering and weakness and the torturing of other human beings; kinship, finally, with death. The audience is able to recognize in its own treatment of other human beings the element of "sacrifice": sacrifice to an ideal, to a myth, to an expectation, to a wish-fulfillment. But it recognizes, also, that such sacrifice is not only obscene in its effects on other human beings, but also vain and useless. We learn that those beliefs or dreams to which we sacrifice other human beings are illusory, created in our own heads and our own hearts according to our own desires. What finally matters is to choose the best way to die not because it will change anything but because there is nothing else. Solon, mourning the death of his son, was asked, "Why do you weep; it avails nothing?"





And he replied: "I weep precisely because it avails nothing." All these elements taken together, then, constitute the form and the vision of what we may now call Websterian tragedy.



## FOOTNOTES

### Chapter I

<sup>1</sup>Boklund, Sources of "The White Devil," 184.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 183. Boklund writes: the "technique [of The White Devil] is remarkably old-fashioned...."

<sup>3</sup>All quotations from The White Devil are taken from the edition of F. L. Lucas.

<sup>4</sup>~~The~~ Endeavors of Art; A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama, 355.

<sup>5</sup>"The Case of John Webster," 40-43.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy, 186, 194; Bridges-Adams, "Tourneur, Webster, Ford," 305; Brown, ed., The White Devil, 21.

For a brilliant refutation of these and similar views, see Baldini, John Webster e il linguaggio della tragedia, esp. 73.

For a study of The Duchess of Malfi which locates the dramatic core of the play in minor conventions, see Ekblad, "The 'Impure Art' of John Webster," 253-267.

An extended study of Webster's use of the conventions of revenge tragedy, stock characters, and omens is found in Stoll, John Webster: The Periods of his Work as Determined by the Relation to the Drama of his Day.

<sup>7</sup>Brooke, John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama, 96-97; Eliot, Essays on the Elizabethan Drama, 113; Swinburne, The Age of Shakespeare, 32; Cecil, "John Webster," 29.

### Chapter II

<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of the dramatic significance of Vittoria's dream see Baldini, John Webster e il linguaggio della tragedia, 78-81; Cecil, "John Webster," 41-43; Fluchère, Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, 112-113.

<sup>2</sup>On Webster's use of the dumb show, see Boklund, Sources of "The White Devil," 155, 183; Lucas, ed., Complete Works, I, 223, n.20ff; Mehl, The Elizabethan Dumb Show: The History of a Dramatic Convention; 138-142.

<sup>3</sup>Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, 302. Italics mine.



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# THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF KING CHARLES THE FIRST

IN THE YEAR 1649

BY JOHN BURNET

1650

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### Chapter III

<sup>1</sup>On the Papal Election, see Brooke, John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama, 95; Brown, "The Papal Election in The White Devil,"

<sup>2</sup>Hughes, ed., Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, 728.

### Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup>For an imaginative analysis of the trial scene, see Baldini, John Webster e il linguaggio della tragedia, 81-95.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 88-89.

<sup>3</sup>Tess of the D'Urbervilles, 153-154.

### Chapter V

<sup>1</sup>Bogarde, The Tragic Satire of John Webster, 102, writes:  
"Sententious statements as Webster uses them are direct comments on the action, and serve as agents of satire. They represent the dramatist's point of view by making a generalized statement to point the significance of a speech or a scene."

<sup>2</sup>But see, also, Boklund, Sources of "The White Devil", 152.

<sup>3</sup>Brooke, John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama, 94, suggests that Flamineo's "affectation of madness is made too much of; for the purpose of amusing, perhaps."

<sup>4</sup>An analysis of the death scene is found in Baldini, John Webster e il linguaggio della tragedia, 137-148.





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### Journal Abbreviations

EC	Essays in Criticism
ELH	English Literary History
ES	English Studies
JEGP	Journal of English and Germanic Philology
MLR	Modern Language Review
MLQ	Modern Language Quarterly
N & Q	Notes and Queries
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Languages Association
RES	Review of English Studies
SEL	Studies in English Literature
SR	Sewanee Review
ShS	Shakespeare Survey



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